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**From:** Purchia, Liz  
**Sent:** Thur 10/22/2015 6:11:55 PM  
**Subject:** RE: FINAL DOI/Reclamation Gold King Mine Report - Embargoed for Public Release to 2PM

Updated story

# APNewsBreak: EPA Mine Spill Could Have Been Prevented

•■■■■■■■■ By MATTHEW BROWN, ASSOCIATED PRESS

BILLINGS, Mont. — Oct 22, 2015, 2:01 PM ET

Government investigators squarely blamed the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Thursday for a 3 million gallon wastewater spill from a Colorado gold mine, saying an EPA cleanup crew rushed its work and failed to consider the complex engineering involved, triggering the very blowout it hoped to avoid.

The spill that fouled rivers in three states would have been avoided had the EPA team checked on water levels inside the Gold King Mine before digging into its entrance, Interior Department investigators concluded.

The Associated Press obtained the findings on the Aug. 5 spill on Thursday prior to their public release. The report has implications across the United States, where hundreds of thousands of abandoned mines have yet to be cleaned up.

The report found that the root causes of the accident began several decades earlier, with changes made by mining companies that altered the flow of groundwater through a series of interconnected tunnels in the extensively mined Upper Animas River watershed.

EPA documents show its officials knew of the potential for a major blowout from the Gold King Mine near Silverton as early as June 2014. EPA officials described the blowout as "likely inevitable" because so much water had built up inside the mine.

The Interior report directly refutes that assertion and says the cleanup team could have used a drill rig to bore into the mine from above to gauge the danger of a blowout.

"This error resulted in development of a plan to open the mine in a manner that appeared to guard against blowout, but instead led directly to the failure," according to engineers from Interior's Bureau of Reclamation who spent two months evaluating the technical circumstances surrounding the accident.

The engineers stopped short of assigning fault to any individuals, despite prior claims from EPA Administrator Gina McCarthy that the probe would determine if any negligence was involved.

A U.S. Army Corps of Engineers official who reviewed the report expressed "serious reservations" over the EPA's failure to explain exactly how its communications broke down, or to justify why its officials were so insistent on starting the work without more information about the engineering complexities involved.

A separate investigation into the spill is pending from the EPA Inspector General's Office.

EPA officials did not immediately respond to a request for comment on the report.

The accident fouled rivers in Colorado, Utah and New Mexico, temporarily shutting down drinking water supplies and cropland irrigation.

Guidelines for cleaning up such mines focus on details such as water sampling and treatment. Yet they have "little appreciation for the engineering complexity" and require but don't receive significant expertise, the Interior Department's 132-page report concluded.

**From:** Purchia, Liz

**Sent:** Thursday, October 22, 2015 2:07 PM

**To:** Natarajan, Nitin <Natarajan.Nitin@epa.gov>; Fritz, Matthew <Fritz.Matthew@epa.gov>; Vaught, Laura <Vaught.Laura@epa.gov>; Distefano, Nichole <DiStefano.Nichole@epa.gov>; Mitchell, Stacey <Mitchell.Stacey@epa.gov>; Harrison, Melissa <Harrison.Melissa@epa.gov>; Stanislaus, Mathy <Stanislaus.Mathy@epa.gov>; Grantham, Nancy <Grantham.Nancy@epa.gov>

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Initial post by AP is out.

Mathy – Please let us know if you're ok with this.

EPA requested the Department of Interior report, *Technical Evaluation of the Gold King Mine Incident*, to provide an independent assessment of the factors that led to the accidental discharge of water from the mine on August 5, 2015. Now that DOI's assessment is complete, EPA will carefully review DOI's findings and recommendations. This report in combination with the findings of EPA's internal review of the incident, will help inform EPA's ongoing efforts to work safely and effectively at mine sites as we carry out our mission to protect human health and the environment.

#### **Associated Press**

<http://bigstory.ap.org/article/7d8b2899205646fcb5f62bc35c29554/apnewsbreak-epa-mine-spill-could-have-been-prevented>

#### **EPA mine spill could have been prevented**

By MATTHEW BROWN

Oct. 22, 2015 1:49 PM ED

BILLINGS, Mont. (AP) — Government investigators squarely blame the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency for a 3 million gallon wastewater spill from a Colorado gold mine, saying a cleanup crew rushed its work and failed to consider the complex engineering involved, triggering the very blowout it hoped to avoid.

The Interior Department probe concludes that the spill that fouled rivers in three states would have been avoided had the EPA team checked on water levels before digging into the mine.

The Associated Press obtained the investigation's findings on the Aug. 5 spill prior to their public release on Thursday. The 132-page report has implications across the United States, where hundreds of thousands of abandoned mines have yet to be cleaned up.

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**To:** Fritz, Matthew <[Fritz.Matthew@epa.gov](mailto:Fritz.Matthew@epa.gov)>; Vaught, Laura <[Vaught.Laura@epa.gov](mailto:Vaught.Laura@epa.gov)>; Distefano, Nichole <[DiStefano.Nichole@epa.gov](mailto:DiStefano.Nichole@epa.gov)>; Mitchell, Stacey <[Mitchell.Stacey@epa.gov](mailto:Mitchell.Stacey@epa.gov)>; Purchia, Liz <[Purchia.Liz@epa.gov](mailto:Purchia.Liz@epa.gov)>; Harrison, Melissa <[Harrison.Melissa@epa.gov](mailto:Harrison.Melissa@epa.gov)>  
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Nitin Natarajan

Deputy Assistant Administrator

Office of Solid Waste and Emergency Response

Environmental Protection Agency

202-566-0200 Office

Begin forwarded message:

**From:** "Brooks, Becky" <[Brooks.Bekky@epa.gov](mailto:Brooks.Bekky@epa.gov)>  
**Date:** October 22, 2015 at 08:49:29 EDT  
**To:** "Natarajan, Nitin" <[Natarajan.Nitin@epa.gov](mailto:Natarajan.Nitin@epa.gov)>  
**Subject:** Fw: FINAL DOI/Reclamation Gold King Mine Report - Embargoed for Public Release to 2PM

So you have as well.

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**From:** Hilosky, Nick  
**Sent:** Thursday, October 22, 2015 8:44 AM  
**To:** Breen, Barry; Deitz, Randy; Lowery, Brigid; Cohen, Nancy; Woolford, James; Stalcup, Dana; Cheatham, Reggie; Tulis, Dana  
**Cc:** Brooks, Becky  
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Close hold until later today.

**From:** DuBray, Daniel [mailto:[ddubray@usbr.gov](mailto:ddubray@usbr.gov)]  
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**Subject:** FINAL DOI/Reclamation Gold King Mine Report - Embargoed for Public Release to 2PM

On behalf of the Bureau of Reclamation and the Department of the Interior, I am transmitting the final Technical Evaluation of the Gold King Mine Incident, prepared by USBRs Technical Service Center in Lakewood, Colorado.

The 132-page report will be distributed this afternoon at 1:00 pm EDT in a pre-notification to interested States, Tribes and Congress. It will be released to the public at 2:00 pm EDT. The url for the report on our site will be activated at 1:00 pm. That URL will be at [www.usbr.gov/docs/goldkingminereport.pdf](http://www.usbr.gov/docs/goldkingminereport.pdf) but the shortened URL <http://on.doi.gov/1RdRhD6> will be used to share the report.

Please contact me with any questions or concerns.

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Dan DuBray

Chief, Public Affairs

Commissioner's Office

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